

STATEMENT OF NORMAN JOHN HART

I, **NORMAN JOHN HART** make the following statement to the Senate Inquiry concerning children in institutional care.

1. I am a retired pensioner. I was born on 27 June 1941 in Mullewa Western Australia.
2. I was placed in the Yalgoo Convent for about 12 months when I was about 6 years old. I was placed there because my mother and father were located in a small country town that had no school. I was the eldest of three children. My other siblings were Brian Mervyn Hart born on 15 August 1946 and Margaret Grace Hart (now Thomas) born 16 November 1943.
3. I was at the Yalgoo Convent for about 12 months. The convent was run by nuns. They were quite pleasant and good to us. I did not wear shoes around the convent. We all went barefooted at that time as it was the normal thing as I remember. When we went either to church or out we wore shoes.
4. Next I went to the Greenough Convent in Greenough. I was there for about 2½ years from about 1950 until about 1952. I believe I went to Greenough because the schooling at Yalgoo was only for the first 2 grades. I was therefore transferred to Greenough for schooling reasons. The nuns were good to me and as I recall we were well fed and cared for.
5. My sister went to a college in Geraldton called Stella Marist when she was about 6 or 7 years old for about 18 months.
6. My brother Brian Hart was at Greenough Convent for about 12 months with me. I think this was in about 1952.
7. My brother Brian Hart and myself were sent to the Salvation Army Boys' Home Nedland Perth in about 1953. Prior to this time we had been living at home in Mullewa for about 6 to 12 months in 1952. I recall my parents got a home for us to go to and there was schooling in Mullewa.

8. We were sent to the Salvation Army Home at Nedlands because my parents separated. Our grandfather was a Salvation Army soldier who played in the band. He organised the placement at the Nedlands home.
9. My brother and I were not wards of the State. My mother paid for our board at the Salvation Army Boys' Home. I remember our belongings were taken and stored for safe keeping when we arrived at the home. We wore Salvation Army clothes. As I remember there was nothing unusual about this. It was normal. As I recall, we were given a locker number. We had both play clothes and school clothes. The number was to identify the locker. We were never called by our locker number but addressed either by our first name or our surname.
10. It was normal for the children to go barefoot. The only time we wore shoes was when we went out. I saw no harm in going barefoot as we did this when we were home with our parents. I believe that if anyone had had a problem with their feet at the Nedlands Home they would have been allowed to wear shoes. I certainly preferred to go barefoot at the Home as did the other boys.
11. I looked after my younger brother Brian as much as I could. Naturally we missed our family but I do not ever recall Brian being continually upset or homesick. We did have contact with our family. Our auntie in Inglewood took us home on long weekends and would look after us. My mother would write to us at least 2 or 3 times a month and we went home to Geraldton at Christmas time for at least 6 weeks.
12. I have no recollection of my brother Brian being hospitalised for an injury to his foot. I do not remember anyone, let alone my own brother, having cracked and wet feet in the winter. I remember a boy who had burns on his feet before he got to the home. I do not remember them bleeding. I do not also recall any problem cutting wood. There were only sticks of pine and they were broken up quite easily without the use of cutting implements. The bigger kids would break up the wood.
13. As I recall the food was alright. It was certainly edible. There was only usually one officer in the dining room sitting on the stage and a boarder who lived at the Home but worked outside. As I recall his name was Envoy Robertson. He usually ate the same meal as the children. I do not ever remember wrigglers or maggots in the stew.
14. I remember a boy who died. He used to take fits. His name was Alan Blood. I do not remember him being a friend of my brother and I do not recall that he was found dead in a toilet.

15. There was a school dentist however I had bad teeth and was sent to the Perth Dental Hospital where my teeth were given fillings.
16. All letters were opened. The reason I remember was to make sure that if any money was sent it was stored safely. Food was also stored and given to you a bit at a time to avoid children scoffing themselves.
17. I do not have any memory of a boy forever polishing an officer's shoes. I do not agree with my brother when he says that "bullying was rife" and I do not ever recall myself or my brother being bullied. I believe if my brother was bullied I would have known about it.
18. I remember that the cane was administered for punishment for things such as going out of bounds, swearing, or disobedience. I do not ever recall any canings or beatings without justification.
19. During my time at Nedlands of about 2½ years I only remember one or two boys ever running away. It was an extremely rare event. The punishment would have been six of the best and/or withdrawal of privileges for say a month. These privileges would include outings to the pictures. I do not recall that either of the boys were made to stand in a quadrangle with hands on head.
20. I do remember that on outings we were taken in a Bedford truck. We were not packed in like cattle. It had a canvas roof. There were seats on the outside perimeter and down the middle. Those children who stood on the outward trip sat on the inward trip and vice versa.
21. Showers were not out in the open but in an enclosure with a roof. It was a separate shower block. The older boys showered first and then the younger ones. The older boys would be required to make sure that the younger ones washed properly. I doubt very much whether my brother ever continually had a cold shower. The younger boys may have had lukewarm showers on occasions.
22. I am surprised by my brother's account of an officer throwing stray cats or kittens into a furnace. I would say this never happened as I never heard of it and my brother never told me about it at the time.
23. My brother refers in his statement to the Committee about me running into a Salvation Army Officer who was at Nedlands. I did run into a Salvation Army Officer Charlie Firth

about 15 years ago. He told me that he had left Nedlands as he wanted a change. He did not say anything about leaving the Salvation Army because of its policy at Nedlands. He said he knew a few boys who were at the home and that they were bus drivers with him at the same depot as he was working at then. I tried to contact Charles Firth several years ago and made enquiries with the Salvation Army however I understood he had died.

24. In summary, I would say that the care by the Salvation Army of both myself and my brother at the Nedlands Boys' Home in the 1950s was normal. I believe that if we had been abused or wrongly or harshly treated our mother would have removed us from the Home. I believe that my brother and I were well cared for by the Salvation Army and the care was similar to the care by the Catholic Nuns.
25. I do not ever recall my brother being abused by anyone at the Nedlands Home. If he had been abused I believe he would have complained to me at the time as I was aged between 12 and 15 and would have taken appropriate action if he had been abused.
26. I do not agree when my brother says that he was neglected and the victim of a poor attitude by the Salvation Army people. I am surprised that my brother did not tell me he was giving evidence before the Senate Inquiry. I would have expected he would have told me about this as I was in the Nedlands Home at the same time.
27. I read in the West Australian newspaper an article dated 5 July 2004 about the Salvation Army paying compensation to a former ward. I believe the article that referred to my brother by name was wrong and misleading. As I have stated before, my brother was not an ex-ward of the State and was not abused.
28. I believe it is important that the Committee hear of my recollections. I have decided to come forward and provide my statement to the Committee as I believe my brother's recollections are misleading and that the Committee ought have a balanced view of experiences at the Nedland Boys' Home in the 1950s. I am adamant that my brother was not abused or mistreated whilst at Nedlands Boys' Home.


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Norman John Hart

Date 02. 7. 04.